Volume 4, Issue 4, April – 2026 **ISSN (E):** 2938-379X

COMMENTARY ON THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE YUAN DYNASTY

Imamnazarov Kakhramon Utkurovich
Associate Professor,
Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

Abstract
This article examines the History of Yuan (Yuan Shi), the official history of the Yuan dynasty, from a critical historiographical perspective. It analyzes the main shortcomings of the text, including its rapid compilation, internal contradictions, and the limited use of Mongolian-language sources. Particular attention is given to the process of "sinicization," through which the history of the Mongol Empire was incorporated into the framework of Chinese dynastic historiography.
The study also reviews the contributions of Chinese and foreign scholars who have attempted to correct, supplement, and reinterpret the Yuan Shi. Works by historians such as Qian Daxin, Wei Yuan, Tu Ji, and Ke Shaomin are discussed as important efforts in addressing its deficiencies. In addition, the role of auxiliary texts and foreign-language sources in reconstructing a more accurate picture of Mongol history is highlighted.
The article concludes that, despite its flaws, the Yuan Shi remains an essential historical source, but it must be used with caution and in conjunction with other materials for a more balanced and reliable interpretation of the Yuan dynasty and the Mongol Empire.

Keywords: Yuan Shi, Yuan Dynasty, Mongol Empire, historiography, Chinese historical sources, Sinicization, Mongol studies, historical methodology.

Introduction

The study of the History of Yuan (*Yuan Shi*), the official history of the Yuan dynasty, occupies an important place in both Chinese and Mongol historiography. Compiled during the early Ming period, the *Yuan Shi* represents one of the primary sources for understanding the political, social, and cultural developments of the Mongol rule in China. However, despite its significance, the work has long been the subject of scholarly criticism due to its methodological weaknesses, inconsistencies, and evident biases.

This article aims to provide a critical commentary on the *Yuan Shi*, focusing on its shortcomings, historiographical limitations, and the debates surrounding its reliability. Special attention is given to the ways in which the compilers of the text shaped and, at times, distorted the historical narrative of the Mongol Empire, particularly through the process of "sinicization," whereby Mongol history was interpreted within the framework of Chinese dynastic tradition.

Furthermore, the article examines the contributions of both Chinese and foreign scholars who have attempted to correct, supplement, and reinterpret the *Yuan Shi* through various works.

Web of Teachers: Inderscience Research
webofjournals.com/index.php/1

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

These studies not only highlight the deficiencies of the original text but also demonstrate the evolving understanding of Yuan and Mongol history over time.

By analyzing both the *Yuan Shi* itself and the extensive body of related scholarship, this paper seeks to offer a more balanced perspective on the historical legacy of the Yuan dynasty and to emphasize the importance of critical engagement with historical sources.

Main part:

During the 13th and 14th centuries, the Mongols built cities in China, dug irrigation canals, and cultivated grain. They established a state-run postal relay system (yam service) and developed communication routes. They also introduced pastoral practices in China and increased the breeding of cattle and horses. However, in the History of Yuan (*Yuan Shi*), the truth about these activities of the Mongols is completely overlooked. The authors of the *Yuan Shi* also ignored the works of Mongol writers and scholars such as Harxasun, Bayan, Chagan, Togon, Ariun, Shadzgay, Alin Temur, Tosh Xay, Tog Temur, and others, who were well known for their knowledge at that time.

It is easy to see that the authors of the *Yuan Shi* expressed nationalist ideas and distorted the historical truth about the Mongol Empire. By attributing events that occurred before 1260—when Kublai Khan ascended the throne of Great Khan—and before 1271—when the empire received its new name—to the Yuan dynasty, they effectively "sinicized" Mongol history in every respect. They granted Chinese titles to earlier khagans who never possessed them and narrated their activities in the style of Chinese dynastic chronicles. According to their interpretation, the entire history of the Mongols from 1206 to 1368 is presented as part of Chinese history.

Many Chinese historians who studied the *Yuan Shi* from different perspectives—from Song Lian and Wang Wei to Ke Shaomin—wrote in a similar manner. Only the well-known Qing specialist in Mongol history, Tu Ji, presented the history of Mongolia prior to the 13th century separately. Even he, however, did not doubt that the Yuan dynasty was a Chinese dynasty and that Kublai was a "Chinese emperor." For example, in his work Meng wu er shi ji (*Historical Notes on the Mongols*), he wrote:

"The boundaries of Mongol history are very broad. If we speak of the Yuan dynasty, then it refers to the events that took place after Kublai became the Chinese emperor. The events from the time of Genghis Khan up to the beginning of Kublai Khagan's reign, or those that occurred in the other three Mongol uluses, do not belong to the history of the Yuan dynasty. Genghis Khan called his state the Mongol state, and only in 1271 did Kublai establish the Great Yuan dynasty."

Some Chinese historians have quite rightly pointed out the shortcomings of the History of Yuan (*Yuan Shi*). Thus, Qian Daxin wrote: "Neither in ancient times nor today has the period for compiling dynastic histories ever been as short as it was for the *Yuan Shi*. Never before have such flawed and inaccurate dynastic histories as the *Yuan Shi* been published at the same time."

The historian Wei Yuan of the Jiaqing era (1799–1820) emphasized:

Web of Teachers: Inderscience Research
webofjournals.com/index.php/1
Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

"The greatest shortcoming of the *Yuan Shi* is that [the history is presented too briefly] for the reigns of the four khans—Kublai's predecessors. The biographies of some prominent officials who distinguished themselves at the founding of the Mongol dynasty have been omitted."

Li Sichun, in his work Yuan shi xue (*Historiography of the Yuan Dynasty*), wrote:

"The *Yuan Shi* was not thoroughly verified, because the Chinese scholars who compiled it did not know the Mongolian language, and the vision of Lords Song and Wang, who carried out the general editing, had deteriorated in their old age. There are no dynastic histories with as many errors and inaccuracies as the *Yuan Shi*, which was written in less than a year."

Before turning to the views of historians, it is necessary to clarify what information historical sources themselves provide on this matter. Among the texts describing the events related to the formation of the Mongol Empire, three are of particular interest to us.

Many foreign scholars, including Chinese historians, have emphasized the need to correct the errors in the History of Yuan (*Yuan Shi*). It is known that during the reign of Hongwu Emperor (1368–1398), the historian Ze Jin made corrections to the *Yuan Shi*, although such a revised edition has not yet been found.

These are the main points I wished to express about the *Yuan Shi*. Scholars studying this source should be aware of the possible errors and inaccuracies in the text when working with it.

It is also very important to mention Chinese works directly related to the *Yuan Shi*. Although they are not primary sources, they are solid scholarly studies that should be read by researchers of Mongol history during the Yuan period. One such work is Yuan shi leibian (*Classified History of the Yuan Dynasty*), consisting of 42 chapters and written by the historian Shao Yuanping during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor reign (1662–1723).

The work is divided into two parts—Basic Annals and Biographies. It contains many errors, especially in the transcription of Mongolian names, which are often written in an unclear manner. Nevertheless, the book represents the first attempt to correct and supplement the *Yuan Shi*.

The works of Qian Daxin, such as Yuan shi she yi (*Collection of Deficiencies in the Yuan Shi*) and Yuan shi kao yi (*Study of Contradictions in the Yuan Shi*), as well as other similar writings, are well known. In these two works, the internal contradictions of the History of Yuan (*Yuan Shi*)—if not entirely—have at least been significantly studied and partially resolved.

The 95-chapter work Yuan shi xin bian (*New Compilation of the Yuan Shi*) was written by the historian Wei Yuan of the Jiaqing and Daoguang periods. In addition to correcting the errors in the *Yuan Shi*, the author attempted to render Mongolian names in more accurate transcription. He was also among those scholars who reduced Mongol history to the history of the Great Yuan Empire. Nevertheless, his work serves as an important resource for studying the *Yuan Shi*.

The works Yuan dai bei jiao zhu wang zhuan (*Biographies of the Princes of the Northern Regions of the Yuan Dynasty*) and Kao ding yuan dai bei fang (*Study of the Northern Regions of the Yuan Dynasty*) were written by the historian He Qiutao. These works are valuable aids in reading the *Yuan Shi* and are especially essential for studying the geographical descriptions of the empire contained within it.

The 102-chapter work Yuan Shu (*History of the Yuan*), by the Qing dynasty historian Zeng Lian, is a compilation of the works of his predecessors.

Web of Teachers: Inderscience Research
webofjournals.com/index.php/1

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

The 30-chapter work Yuan Shi Yi Wen Zheng Bu (*Correction and Supplement to the Yuan Shi with Translated Texts*) was written by the Qing dynasty historian Hong Jun. He composed this work after consulting sources on Mongol history in Arabic, Persian, Russian, French, English, and German. Most of the material in his book consists of translations. Hong Jun was the first Chinese historian to use foreign sources in studying the History of Yuan (*Yuan Shi*).

The 60-chapter work Meng wu er shi ji (*Historical Records of the Mongols*) was written by Tu Ji. Well-versed in Mongolian literature, he surpassed his predecessors in the use of Mongol sources and materials. At the same time, he firmly included in the history of the Yuan dynasty the reigns of all Mongol khagans, including those before Kublai Khan. In his work, he described events from the reigns of Genghis Khan, Jochi, Ogedei Khan, and Mongke Khan, and titled it *Historical Records of the Mongols*, considering this title more appropriate than "History of the Yuan Dynasty." Tu Ji presents the real situation based on a subtle and critical analysis of historical facts.

This work contains new and interesting information about Mongol tribes such as the Naiman, Kereit, Tayichiud, as well as about figures like Tayang Khan and Wang Khan.

The 257-chapter work Xin Yuan Shi (*New History of the Yuan Dynasty*) was written by the Kuomintang-era Chinese historian and specialist in Mongol history Ke Shaomin. The author worked tirelessly on this book for 30 years. It was completed in 1930 and first published in 1935 in Beijing by the Kaiming Shudian publishing house. The book is based on the works of earlier historians who studied the *Yuan Shi* in one way or another. It may be regarded as a comprehensive Qing-period-style study of the *Yuan Shi*. However, it cannot be considered a true primary source suitable as a foundation for independent research; rather, it serves as a scholarly reference work.

The main shortcoming of this work is that the author does not cite his sources, making it difficult to determine exactly where specific information was obtained.

In conclusion, the History of Yuan (*Yuan Shi*) remains one of the most important yet problematic sources for the study of the Yuan dynasty and the Mongol Empire. Although it preserves valuable historical data on political structures, administration, and key figures of the period, its reliability is limited by the circumstances of its compilation, including the haste of its production, editorial weaknesses, and the lack of direct engagement with Mongolian-language sources.

The analysis of the *Yuan Shi* demonstrates that its authors often reshaped Mongol history within the framework of Chinese dynastic tradition, leading to distortions such as the "sinicization" of earlier Mongol rulers and the reinterpretation of pre-Yuan events as part of Chinese history. These issues make it necessary for scholars to approach the text with critical caution.

At the same time, the efforts of later historians—such as Qian Daxin, Wei Yuan, Tu Ji, and Ke Shaomin—have played a crucial role in identifying its shortcomings and attempting to correct and supplement its content. Their works, along with foreign sources and auxiliary studies, contribute to a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the Yuan period.

Therefore, while the *Yuan Shi* cannot be regarded as a fully reliable or complete account, it continues to serve as an indispensable foundation for research. Its effective use requires

Web of Teachers: Inderscience Research
webofjournals.com/index.php/1

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

comparison with other sources, careful textual analysis, and an awareness of its historiographical limitations.

References

1.Бартольд В.В. Туркестан в эпоху монгольского нашествия. – М., 1963.- 670 с.
2. Березин И. Очерк внутреннего устройства Улуса Джучиева. - СПБ, 1863. – 360 с.
3. Вернадский Г.В. О составе Великой Яссы Чингисхана.- Брюссель, 1939. – 252 с.
4. Владимирцов Б.Я. Общественный строй монголов. Монгольский кочевой феодализм.- Ленинград, 1934. – 250 с.
5. Владимирцов Б.Я. Чингисхан.- Горно-Алтайск, 1982. – 320 с.
6. Всемирная история. Крестоносцы и монголы.- Минск, 2002.- 460 с.
7. Григорьев А.П. Монгольская дипломатика XIII-XIV в.в., - М., 1978. – 272 с.
8. FEDOROVNA, P. O., ABDULKHAEVICH, A. N., MIRZABEKOVNA, K. F., & UTKUROVICH, I. K. (2025). THE HISTORICAL FACTOR OF THE CITY OF DUNHUANG ON THE GREAT SILK ROAD IN THE DISCOURSE OF SINOLOGY. *TPM–Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, *32*(S8 (2025): Posted 05 November), 1906-1911. Retrieved from https://tpmap.org/submission/index.php/tpm/article/view/3051
9. Д. Оссон К. От Чингисхана до Тамерлана.- Алматы: Санат, 1986.- 360 с.

Web of Teachers: Inderscience Research
webofjournals.com/index.php/1
Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.